

07 NOV 2000

River (special report)

LOVE OUR RIVER CAMPAIGN TAKES A NEW COURSE

By: Jamaluddin Mohamad

ALOR SETAR, Nov 7 (Bernama) -- When Razak Ahmad, a hawker, threw rubbish into Sungai Kedah, little did he realise that he was actually throwing money and not rubbish.

For every tonne of rubbish he threw, the authorities spent about RM250 for the cleaning-up operation, Phuah Kim Heng, the Kedah Drainage and Irrigation Department Director, said.

The money spent on the cleaning-up operation did not click in Razak's mind until his business faced some difficulties as people started shunning his stall because the river looked so dirty.

"I cleaned up the river by collecting all the rubbish and beautified the river bank by planting some flowers. Business is back as usual now and is in fact attracting more customers," Razak said.

He has pledged to keep the river visibly clean and beautiful as people can enjoy their food while appreciating the environment.

Hundreds will join Razak in making the pledge when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad launches the national-level "Love Our River" campaign in Alor Setar this Friday.

Phuah said the campaign which had been going on since 1993 had instilled awareness among the public on the importance of keeping rivers clean.

However, this time the focus is on getting pledges from government departments, corporate, industrial and agricultural sectors, the village development and security committees, non-governmental organisations and schools to participate actively in the river conservation and management programmes.

Four sectors -- river landscaping, gross pollution trap scheme, sullage water treatment and river adoption -- have been identified for them to participate in through gotong-royong or sponsorship.

Phuah said government offices, factories, schools and residential areas located near rivers could help landscape the river banks by planting flowers or even building jogging tracks.

"When they beautify the river banks themselves, they can appreciate the river more instead of taking the beautiful scenery for granted if works are carried out by authorities. There will be a sense of ownership," Phuah said.

He said the gross pollution trap scheme was targeted at the industrial and agricultural sectors which could build the facility for between RM30,000 and RM300,000 to trap rubbish at the source before discharging their effluents into the river.

Sullage water treatment was also aimed at the two groups so that they could treat their effluents before discharging them into the river for better quality river water, he said.

Phuah said the river adoption scheme could be participated by all groups to enable them to manage their nearby rivers in terms of cleanliness and beautification.

There are 150 river basins in the country including six in Kedah.

"The authorities collect 20 tonnes of rubbish from Sungai Kedah alone every month and spend about RM5,000 for the cleaning-up operation monthly," he said.

About 450 pledges, including from political parties, have been received to date.

"Our task is to monitor their pledge after the launch. We don't want empty pledges. We will provide them with the necessary assistance and guidance in fulfilling their pledges," Phuah said.

-- BERNAMA

JM JK